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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 12/18/07

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Articles:

1) OPINION

Poll: Support for Fukuda cabinet falls to 33 PERCENT ; Nonsupport rises to 44 PERCENT

MAINICHI (Top play) (Abridged)  
December 18, 2007

The Mainichi Shimbun conducted a telephone-based nationwide public opinion survey on Dec. 15-16. The rate of public support for Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and his cabinet was 33 PERCENT , down 13 percentage points from the last survey taken in October. The nonsupport rate for the Fukuda cabinet was 44 PERCENT , up 14 points. The Fukuda cabinet's disapproval rating topped its approval rating for the first time since it came into office in September. The government has now given up on resolving the issue of pension records for unidentified persons, and Fukuda recently made a controversial remark over this issue. The drop in the support rate can be taken as reflecting these events. In public support for political parties, the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) outpaced the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The Fukuda administration will inevitably face difficulties.

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The Mainichi Shimbun has so far conducted three surveys on the Fukuda cabinet. In the first survey, which was taken Sept. 25-26 right after its inauguration, the Fukuda cabinet's support rate was 57 PERCENT . In the Oct. 20-21 survey, however, its support rate went down to 46 PERCENT . In the latest one, it showed a substantial drop for the second time in a row. Among men, the Fukuda cabinet's support rate was 31 PERCENT , with its nonsupport rate at 49 PERCENT . Among women, the support rate was 35 PERCENT , with nonsupport at 40 PERCENT .

In the survey this time, respondents were also asked about the desirable form of government. In response to this question, 23 PERCENT chose a grand coalition of the LDP and the DPJ, with 21 PERCENT preferring a DPJ-led coalition government and 17 PERCENT opting for the current coalition government of the LDP and New Komeito. In terms of noncoalition governments, 10 PERCENT of respondents chose LDP single-party rule, with 11 PERCENT opting for DPJ single-party rule. The figures show that there are many people seeking a change and pinning their hopes on the DPJ.

In the breakdown of public support for political parties, the DPJ stood at 27 PERCENT , with the LDP at 26 PERCENT . In the last survey, the two parties were even at 27 PERCENT . This time, however, the DPJ is above the LDP as in previous surveys taken around this July's election for the House of Councillors.

Meanwhile, the Maritime Self-Defense Force has now withdrawn from its Indian Ocean refueling mission due to its governing law's Nov. 1 expiry. In the survey this time, respondents were asked if they thought the MSDF refueling mission should be resumed. To this question, 41 PERCENT answered "yes," with 50 PERCENT saying "no." In the last survey, respondents were asked if they thought the MSDF's refueling activities should be continued. To that question, 48 PERCENT answered "yes," with 43 PERCENT saying "no." In the survey this time, negative answers outnumbered affirmative ones.

If a government-introduced bill seeking to resume the MSDF's refueling activities is voted down in the House of Councillors or is not put to a vote within 90 days after it is sent from the House of Representatives, the ruling coalition will revoke on the bill in the House of Representatives to enact it into law. Respondents were

asked if they supported this stance. To this question, 57 PERCENT answered "no," with 32 PERCENT saying "yes." As seen from these figures, negative answers substantially outnumbered affirmative ones.

Such figures can be taken as being affected by a series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry.

2) U.S. Ambassador expresses hope for early resumption of refueling operation, also saying that (President Bush) understands importance of abduction issue

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer held a meeting with the Japanese press in Tokyo yesterday, in which the Ambassador expressed hope for an early resumption of the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling operation in the Indian Ocean. The Ambassador said: "It was regrettable that the operation was suspended, but Prime Minister Fukuda has decided to resume the operation. I hope the Japanese

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people will understand the significance of Japan contributing to the international order."

Also, in connection with the question of delisting North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, the Ambassador said: "I have advised President Bush that how the abduction issue is handled is a matter that could significantly affect U.S.-Japan relations. As the President clearly stated during the U.S.-Japan summit in November that he will not forget the abduction issue, I think he understands its importance." He also expressed concern over a series of irregularities involving the Defense Ministry, saying, "They could adversely affect the operational capability of the U.S.-Japan alliance."

3) Abu Dhabi expresses hopes for Japan's early resumption of refueling mission

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

Prime Minister Fukuda met with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed at the Prime Minister's Official Residence last night. The prime minister said: "The government is making utmost efforts to enact the new antiterrorism bill to resume the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean." The prince expressed his hopes for Japan's early resumption of the mission, saying: "The presence of Japan in the Indian Ocean is essential." The two leaders also confirmed the need to strengthen bilateral ties in not only energy but also many other areas.

4) MSDF to test SM-3 missile for 1st time

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

The Defense Ministry announced that the Maritime Self-Defense Force would test-fire a missile interceptor for the first time early on Dec. 18 Japan time in waters off the U.S. Hawaiian island of Kauai to shoot down a dummy ballistic missile. The Kongo, an MSDF Aegis-equipped destroyer, will use the sea-based Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) interceptor for the test. Japan is the first country other than the United States to test-fire the SM-3 interceptor. The SM-3 will be deployed in early next year.

In the test, a U.S. missile site, which is located on the western tip of Kauai Island, will launch a dummy ballistic missile. The Kongo is in waters several hundred kilometers away from the missile site to detect and track the target, and will launch an SM-3 missile to intercept the target at an altitude of more than 100 kilometers outside the earth's atmosphere.

The seaborne SM-3 test this time is intended to check to see if the Aegis ship's missile defense (MD) system will work normally. In the

initial phase, the Kongo's radar will detect and track the target. In the second phase, the Kongo will fire an SM-3 interceptor and guide it to the target. In the third phase, the fired SM-3 interceptor's warhead will be separated and redirected to destroy the target.

The United States first test-fired an SM-3 interceptor in January 2002 and conducted a total of 12 SM-3 intercept tests until last month. The United States was successful in 10 of those 12 tests.

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However, the Defense Ministry is cautious as all eyes are only on whether the SM-3 can make it, with an official saying, "The test is not necessarily intended to intercept the target."

The Kongo, Japan's first destroyer equipped with the SM-3 interceptor system, will be deployed in the current fiscal year. The Defense Ministry plans to renovate an Aegis destroyer every year for MD and to deploy a total lineup of four SM-3-equipped Aegis destroyers by the end of fiscal 2010.

If the SM-3 fails to intercept ballistic missiles at sea, the Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3), a ground-to-air guided missile system, is to intercept them. The PAC-3 was first deployed in March this year to the Air Self-Defense Force's Iruma base in Saitama Prefecture. Japan's MD system will now go operational in full gear.

5) 2ND LD: Japan intercepts ballistic missile in test KAUAI ISLAND, Hawaii, Dec. 17 KYODO (EDS: UPDATING)

December 18, 2007 07:56:34

Japan successfully carried out a test to intercept a target in space using a U.S.-made ballistic missile over the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii on Monday, Defense Ministry officials said.

It was the first test of the high-tech Standard Missile 3 by a country other than the United States, according to the officials. The interceptor hit the target at around 0:11 p.m. local time Tuesday, or 7:11 a.m. Japan time Monday.

Experts said the missile test is a key step in the completion of Japan's missile shield against North Korea, while also voicing concern that the development of the system could affect the balance of defense capabilities in the East Asian region that includes China and Russia.

On Monday morning, the Maritime Self-Defense Force's Aegis-equipped destroyer Kongou launched an SM-3 missile from waters far off Kauai Island to intercept a target in space that was launched from the island by the United States, they said.

The system using the sea-based SM-3 interceptor covers the upper range of Japan's two-layer missile defense shield.

The SM-3 is designed to intercept incoming ballistic missiles outside of the earth's atmosphere, while the ground-based Patriot Advanced Capability 3 is designed to intercept missiles missed by the SM-3, they said.

The project to enable the Kongou to deal with a possible ballistic missile attack was initially planned for the end of fiscal 2007 in March 2008, top MSDF commander Adm. Eiji Yoshikawa said recently.

But the plan was moved forward by three months following North Korea's test launching of ballistic missiles in July 2006 over the Sea of Japan, the MSDF chief of staff said.

Yoshikawa also said the MSDF plans to make the SM-3 system operational on the MSDF's three other Aegis destroyers by the end of fiscal 2010.

The first PAC-3 missile launcher was introduced at the Iruma base of the Air Self-Defense Force in Saitama Prefecture in March this year. The ASDF has also equipped the Narashino base in Chiba Prefecture, east of Tokyo, with PAC-3 missiles.

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The Defense Ministry plans to deploy PAC-3 missile launchers at nine other ASDF bases around Japan by fiscal 2010.

6) Record 6,130 residents file Atsugi base pollution lawsuit seeking 4.6 billion yen in compensation

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Almost full)  
December 18, 2007

A record number 6,130 people living near the Atsugi base (straddling Yamato and Ayase cities in Nakagawa Prefecture), which is now being jointly used by the U.S. Navy and the Maritime Self-Defense Force, have filed a fourth lawsuit with the Yokohama District Court against the government seeking a total of 4.656 billion yen in compensation for noise pollution from aircraft using the base that caused mental and physical distress for them. Of them, 500 have also filed an administrative lawsuit seeking the suspension of flights of military aircraft.

The number of plaintiffs is the largest ever in noise lawsuits in Japan. It is also the first time that an administrative lawsuit has been filed seeing the suspension of flights of military aircraft.

The lawsuit was filed by residents of eight cities near the base, such as Yamato and Ayase, that recorded over 75 on the Weighted Equivalent Continuous Perceived Noise Level (WECPNL). The government for the first time in 20 years in January 2006 reviewed the areas eligible to receive subsidies for soundproofing work. The plaintiffs include residents of Chigasaki and Tokyo's Machida City that joined the government's list of subsidies after January 2006.

According to the written complaint, U.S. military and SDF aircrafts are causing severe noise pollution at the base. It maintains that although courts have ruled three times in the past that the noise level at the base was illegal, the problem has not been resolved, and therefore, the government that manages the airport is responsible to make reparation for the damage.

Under the national redress law, the group is seeking 20,000 yen a month per person in compensation for damage in the last three years before the lawsuit as well as for the future until the noise pollution is settled. Some plaintiffs have filed both criminal and administrative lawsuits seeing the suspension of flights.

In the first and second Atsugi base lawsuits, courts rejected the plaintiffs' calls for the suspension of lights but ruled in favor of them regarding compensation for damage in the past. In the third lawsuit, the court ordered the government to pay a total of 4 billion yen in compensation to the plaintiffs living in areas over 75 WECPNL. The decision became final in July last year.

7) Moriya to be rearrested today; GE voiced appreciation at party after receiving CX order

YOMIURI (Top play) (Excerpts)  
December 18, 2007

"It was good that your company was able to win the order." "Yes, thanks to you, Mr. Vice Minister." This conversation allegedly took place between former Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya, 63, and an engine maker executive shortly after a decision was made on the

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engine for the Air Self-Defense Force's next-generation cargo aircraft (CX) in connection with a bribery and corruption case over the procurement of defense equipment. The special investigation squad of the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office will indict and rearrest Moriya today, the deadline for custody, for taking approximately 4 million yen in bribes from former Yamada Corp. managing director Motonobu Miyazaki, 69, concluding that Moriya gave favors to Yamada in the form of awarding the CX engine order in return for being treated to free golf and trips.

Moriya allegedly told investigators that he received 4 million yen

in the knowledge that it was a bribe. The special investigation squad will also rearrest Miyazaki and Osamu Akiyama, 70, the former president of Yamada's U.S. subsidiary, on suspicion of giving bribes to Moriya.

At the same time, prosecutors have decided not to rearrest Moriya's wife Sachiko, 56, concluding that she had played only a supporting role and not to prosecute her after releasing her by keeping the punishment for taking bribes and free rounds of golf on hold.

According to relevant sources, Miyazaki around 2002 lobbied Moriya, who was Defense Policy Bureau director general at the time, to select a General Electric product as the CX engine. Through Miyazaki, Moriya allegedly met with a GE executive who visited Japan at the end of that year, when the executive directly urged Moriya to select (the GE engine).

8) Japan declines request by Burundi for airlift support for PKO troops to Darfur

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

It was learned yesterday that the Japanese government declined a request by the Republic of Burundi this October for cooperation in transporting its troops to participate in a joint African Union (AU) / United Nations hybrid operation (UNAMID), which will start in the Darfur region of western Sudan next year. In this region, a serious humanitarian crisis is going on, and Burundi is planning to participate in UNAMID. As the reason for its refusal, the government cited the lack of a ceasefire agreement between the parties concerned, one of the five principles set for Japan to participate in peacekeeping operations, according to government sources.

The humanitarian crisis in Darfur has drawn much attention internationally. This issue is expected to be on the agenda at a meeting of the Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD) next May and the Lake Toya Summit in Hokkaido next July. Japan, which will host the Toya Summit, is likely to receive more requests for international contributions.

According to informed sources, the Burundi government, which lacks enough transport equipment, such as helicopters, unofficially asked the Japanese government to airlift troops to Darfur when they join UNAMID. But Tokyo gave a negative reply, with a senior Foreign Ministry official saying: "No comprehensive peace accord has been reached between the Sudan government and the antigovernment force." The AU unit has been deployed in the Darfur region since August 2004. This July, the UN Security Council decided to dispatch UNAMID there. Most of the participating countries are from Africa, and materials and funds for UNAMID are significantly lacking. Some

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observers anticipate that the start of UNAMID activities planned for next January may be greatly delayed.

9) Premier to visit China on Dec. 27: Talks with President Hu on the 28th

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)  
December 18, 2007

The outline of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's schedule to visit China was set yesterday. He will leave for Beijing on Dec. 27 and meet with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. He will also visit Wen's hometown of Tianjin, as well as Taian in Shandong Province, where the sacred Mt. Taian, which has recently established a "sister mountain relationship" with Mt. Fuji, is located. He thus wants to create a friendly mood between the two countries. He is scheduled to return home on the 30th.

Fukuda wants to demonstrate his determination to strengthen bilateral ties by visiting the nation right after completing the compilation of the fiscal 2008 budget.

In talks with Hu, the two leaders are expected to confirm their

determination to further promote strategic and reciprocal relations by characterizing 2008, which will mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty, as a "year of progress in Japan-China relations." However, it appears difficult for them to reach an agreement on the pending issue of jointly developing gas fields in the East China Sea, because a gap in the views of the two countries remains.

10) "Campaign flyers caused misunderstanding," says premier, apologizing for LDP pension pledge

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

Regarding the criticism of the government's and the ruling parties' approach to the pension record error issue as a breach of a public pledge, Prime Minister Fukuda yesterday offered an apology, noting, "It is true that the party's flyers included words that caused misunderstanding." Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Masuzoe noted that it would be difficult to identify the holders of nearly 40 PERCENT of 50 million unidentified public pension premium payment records. There is no chance that the government can deliver on its pledge to identify the very last pension account holder and pay benefits. However, the prime minister stressed the government stance of continuing to tackle the work of matching records.

He made that comment in response to questions asked by reporters at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei). He admitted that flyers the LDP prepared for the Upper House election campaign in July went too far. The flyers said that the government and the LDP would complete the identification of all public pension account holders and that all public pension holders can receive the full amount they are entitled to.

The prime minister also stressed that there will be no change in the government policy of implementing the matching procedure by March 2008, as the government and the ruling camp decided on July 5. He noted: "We don't know whether we can complete the procedure until we go through all unidentified pension accounts. We are now in the

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middle of that process. We will continue to tenaciously check every single account."

He also defended former Prime Minister Abe, who pledged during the Upper House election campaign, "The government will check to the very last person and pay benefits," saying, "I think he made a comparatively proper comment." However, Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura during a press conference yesterday said, "Some holders are deceased. It is not possible to identify records to the very last person. The 50 million cases include those who are unidentifiable from the start."

11) Biggest crisis since the foundation of the party says LDP in 2008 action program: Calls for beefing up support, placing priority on regional areas

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

The 2008 draft action program of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was revealed yesterday. The draft characterizes the present state of the LDP as facing its greatest crisis since the foundation of the party in the wake of the crushing defeat in the July Upper House election. It also notes that the party will speed up efforts to prepare for the next Lower House election, as well as to correct disparities, by giving consideration to regional areas and extending more assistance to the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors. Regarding measures to deal with the current Diet situation, where the opposition camp has dominance in the Upper House, the program mentions that the party will establish a new Diet management mechanism, calling on opposition parties to come to the table for policy talks.

The action program will be adopted at a party convention to be held on January 17 next year. It underscored the LDP's determination to

set up a solid structure, by abandoning its overconfidence that it is strong in regional areas or it could do better if it only receives a boost from the public. It also included the party's determination to make efforts to field more candidates in the next election as well as to strengthen exchanges with friendly organizations to revitalize its support base and recruit more party members.

On the policy front, the draft stressed that peace of mind must be felt by people in their daily lives. As key policy measures, it listed correction of income disparities, promotion of agriculture, forestry and fisheries policy, measures for small- and medium-size businesses, establishment of a reliable public pension system, and revamping the medical services system.

The draft also notes that the party will continue to address its basic policies, including enactment of a new constitution, continuation of Yasukuni Shrine visits by key government officials, and a settlement of the territorial issue with Russia.

12) DPJ gearing up for attacking government over pension mess, to seek timing for submitting censure motion against prime minister

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2007

Taking advantage of growing public criticism of the government over  
TOKYO 00005591 009 OF 009

the issue of unidentified pension records, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is poised to relentlessly pursue in the re-extended Diet session the response measures taken by the government and the ruling coalition. The government pledged in the July House of Councillors election that it would identify all the holders of the 50 million unidentified pension accounts by next March. The DPJ takes the "withdrawal" of this pledge as a perfect tailwind for the party. The main opposition party intends to seek the best timing for submitting censure motions against Prime Minister Yasuo and relevant cabinet ministers over the pension issue, as well as on the series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry.

In reference to the sharp drops in public support for the Fukuda cabinet shown in latest public polls, DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama told reporters yesterday: "The polls found that the people, as expected, have a growing interest in the pension mess. A series of very irresponsible remarks by cabinet ministers drove down the support rates."

The reignition of the pension fiasco is a favorable factor for the DPJ, which has grilled the government over its sloppy responses. Many DPJ members have made bullish remarks, as Akira Nagatsuma, state minister in charge of pension issues in the "next cabinet," said: "If the government remains unable to settle the pension problem, it should hand over the political reins to us."

The opposition party, though, has yet to elaborate a strategy on how to make the most use of the tailwind caused by the misstep by its opponent. The key lies in when the party, while watching the Diet schedule for deliberations on the government's new antiterrorism bill that would enable the Maritime Self-Defense Force to resume its refueling operation in the Indian Ocean, would play such important cards as a censure motion against the prime minister.

Hatoyama said: "We need to consider the possibility of also censuring the government for its way of handling the pension problem, besides the new antiterror bill. We may submit such in the ongoing extraordinary Diet session or in the next regular Diet session." But Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka just said in a BS program: "I wonder if the antiterror bill deserves to be called to account."

In the DPJ, various views about submitting censure motions have been heard, such as: "We should carefully watch how the series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry will affect the political world;" and "We should not use the censure card until debate on a provisional road tax rate that will affect gasoline prices heat

up. "

SCHIEFFER